

Finding and Using U.S. Church Records

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Church Records in the United States: A Brief Overview

Church records are vital sources for genealogists and family historians. In addition to providing crucial information sometimes unavailable anywhere else (birth, marriage, place of residence), they also offer unique insight into our ancestors' lives and beliefs.

If you're unsure of your ancestor's religious affiliation and thus unclear on what church records to search, here's a few tips:

- *Where* they lived might offer a hint
 - Denominations often tend to concentrate in particular areas
 - During the 17th and 18th centuries, for example, Congregationalists made up well over half of all religious adherents in New England, while Anglicans (and later, Baptists) tended to dominate the southern colonies of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. In the nineteenth century, Methodists grew to become the nation's largest Protestant denomination; their growth was focused in the mid-Atlantic region and all along the western frontier, especially in the South. To this day, religious membership is concentrated in certain regions (Mormons in Utah, Lutherans in the Upper Midwest, and Baptists throughout the South).
- *Where* they (or their ancestors) came from provides another hint

Country of Origin	Prominent Church	Church in U.S.
Denmark	Lutheran	Lutheran
Finland	Lutheran	Lutheran
France	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic
Germany	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic
Italy	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic
Latin Countries	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic
Norway	Lutheran	Lutheran
Poland	Roman Catholic	Roman Catholic
Scotland	Church of Scotland	Presbyterian
Sweden	Lutheran	Lutheran
England	Church of England or Anglicans	Protestant Episcopal

Church Records: What's Available and Where?

General Guides & Databases

- [https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Church_Records#How to Locate Church Records](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Church_Records#How_to_Locate_Church_Records)
- http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=Types_of_Church_Records

Methodists

- United Methodist Church General Commission on Archives and History (Madison, NJ) www.gcah.org/research/how-to-research-your-family
- American Methodism Project: <https://archive.org/details/americanmethodism>

Baptists

- American Baptist Historical Society (Atlanta, GA)
<http://abhsarchives.org/for-researchers/genealogy/>
- Southern Baptist Historical Society & Archives (Nashville, TN)
<http://www.sbhla.org/familyhistory.htm>

Presbyterians

- Presbyterian Historical Society (Philadelphia, PA)
<http://www.history.pcusa.org/services/reference/genealogy-and-family-history-research>

Episcopalians

- Archives of the Episcopal Church (Austin, TX)
<http://www.episcopalarchives.org/genealogy.html>

Catholics

- American Catholic Historical Society (Philadelphia, PA)
<http://www.amchs.org/research/genealogy.html>

Jews

- American Jewish Historical Society (New York, NY)
<http://www.ajhs.org/collections/genealogy.cfm>
- The Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute (New York, NY)
<http://www.cjh.org/p/34>

Quakers

- Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library (Swarthmore, PA)
<http://www.swarthmore.edu/friends-historical-library/quaker-history-genealogy>